

Yuma Clapper Rail (*Rallus longirostris yumanensis*)

Status -- Federal: Endangered; California: Threatened



Photo: B. "Moose", Peterson/WRP

The Yuma clapper rail is a secretive, chicken-shaped marsh bird with a long, down-curved beak. Both sexes are slate brown above, with light cinnamon underparts and barred flanks. Fully grown, this bird measures 14 - 16 inches (35 - 41 cm) long. Rarely visible in the dense marsh vegetation it inhabits, the Yuma clapper rail can be detected by its call. Unpaired males make a *kek* call



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early in the breeding season. Other vocalizations, including the *clapper*, or *clatter* call are made -sometimes simultaneously- by both members of a mated pair or even from several pairs. While other clapper rails are vocal year round, Yuma clapper rails are nearly silent in winter.

Range: The historical distribution of the Yuma clapper rail is not known but is presumed to have been centered on the Colorado River delta in northern Mexico. Yuma clapper rails today occupy marshland along the lower Colorado River, from just north of Needles in San Bernardino County, south through Riverside and Imperial counties to the river's delta. Other nesting areas include the Salton Sea and its drainages

in California and the Salt and Gila rivers in Arizona.

Habitat: Of the 3 subspecies of clapper rail in California, only the Yuma inhabits freshwater marshes; in Mexico, it also inhabits brackish marshes. This rail requires regenerating marsh for foraging, and mature stands of cattail and bulrush for nesting. Regenerating marsh borders the open water and provides the birds with prey -usually crayfish, small fish, beetles, and isopods. Mature cattail and bulrush stands provide materials for nest building and cover for the nests; these stands grow near areas of open water and drier upland habitat.

Breeding: The mating season for Yuma clapper rails occurs from mid-March to July. Females lay 6 - 7 eggs which they incubate for 23 - 28 days. Given their secretive nature, little else is known about their breeding biology. Among other clapper rail subspecies, both parents are known to incubate and tend the young. The young fledge in 63 - 70 days. Yuma clapper rails were formerly believed to be migratory and to overwinter in Mexico. Recent research, suggests that most of them do not migrate, although the young disperse after the breeding season.

Endangerment: Marsh habitat losses to river water diversion and damming of the Colorado River, dredging operations, mosquito abatement programs, and erosion control efforts have all reduced nesting habitat. Some studies are also looking at selenium contamination, as a potential cause of reduced reproductive success of Yuma and Black rails in Arizona along the Colorado River.